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*TÁTAḤ KṢARATI AKṢÁRAM.*  
A HISTORY OF AN ABSTRACT NOTION

**Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to explore the beginnings of abstract thought in the early history of Indian philosophy. I will argue that the ability for abstraction is evidenced in the Veda and that the abstract notions used in the later tradition have their roots in the most archaic thinking<sup>1</sup>.

This issue is important, not only from the point of view of Indology, but from a more general point of view of philosophy seen as a human endeavor that is not limited to the European tradition. Unlike European philosophy which did not preserve any fragment of its earliest Presocratic thought in the original form<sup>2</sup>, the rich source of the Indian Vedic tradition shows us the beginnings of human philosophical inquiry.

In my research I use, apart from standard philological methodology, the methodology of cognitive linguistics. This is a branch of linguistics that investigates verbal and non-verbal signs seen as an expression of thought. George Lakoff developed this theory of language in the 1970's<sup>3</sup>. Cognitive

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<sup>1</sup> I discussed this problem at length in Jurewicz J. *Fire and Cognition in the Rgveda*. Warszawa: 2010

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Kirk, G.S., Raven, J.E. & Schofield, M., *The Presocratic Philosophers (Second Edition)*, Cambridge 1983, Eric Alfred Havelock: 'The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics'. In: *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy*. K. Robb (ed.). La Salle, Illinois: 1983, p. 7-82.

<sup>3</sup> Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago 1980, Lakoff G. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago and London 1987.

linguistics has now become a huge discipline encompassing the whole range of linguistic phenomena, human thinking and their neural base.

Cognitive linguistics proposes three models of mental operation which reflect themselves through signs namely conceptual metaphor, metonymy and blending<sup>4</sup>. In my analysis I will refer primarily to the metaphoric model. Conceptual metaphor is an operation which enables thinking about one concept in terms of another. The concept which provides the categories is called the source domain, the concept which is conceived in terms of those categories is called the target domain. For example, in the Indo-European languages cognition is conceived in terms of seeing: seeing is the source domain, cognition is the target domain<sup>5</sup>. The conceptual metaphor reflects itself in language so that we can meaningfully say: *I see what you mean* when we understand someone else's thought. Usually complex concepts are conceived with the aid of various source domains. Cognition is just such a complex concept and can also be conceptualized in terms of grasping as, reflected in the sentence: *'Now, I've grasped your point.'*

Conceptual metaphor is used in everyday thinking, in creative activity (art, advertising) and in social activities for example politics and religion<sup>6</sup>. It is also used in philosophy to a much wider extent than we like it to confess. As Lakoff and Johnson has shown many abstract concepts in European philosophy such as time, the mind and the self are motivated by metaphorical thinking<sup>7</sup>. For example, Descartes uses the above mentioned metaphor Knowing Is Seeing in his theory of cognition and elaborates the concept of light in his theory of

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<sup>4</sup> For conceptual metaphor cf. e.g. Lakoff, Johnson, *Metaphors...*, Lakoff G. 'The contemporary theory of metaphor'. In: Ortony A. (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge 1993, p. 202-251. For conceptual metonymy cf. Panther K.-U., Radden G. (eds.) *Metonymy in Language and Thought*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia 1999. For conceptual blending cf. Fauconnier G., Turner M. *The way we think. Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York 2003

<sup>5</sup> Sweetser E.. *From Etymology to Pragmatics. Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990

<sup>6</sup> Semino E. *Metaphor in Discourse*. Cambridge University Press 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Lakoff G, Johnson M. *Philosophy in the Flesh. The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York 1999.

intuition, e.g. “Intuition is the undoubting conception of an *unclouded* mind, and springs from *the light of reason* alone”<sup>8</sup>. Within the scenario of seeing light plays an essential role as the factor which renders seeing possible. We have to know about that in order to understand the role of reason played in Descartes’ concept of intuition: reason enables cognition as the light enables seeing. Thus the concept of light has an important explanatory role in the definition of intuition. It would be very difficult to reformulate this definition in pure abstract language without using the concept of light. Yet the metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING is so deeply entrenched in our thinking that we hardly notice the metaphorical character of Descartes’ exposition. Probably he thought that he was using purely abstract terminology.

In this paper I will come back to discuss the metaphor PROCESS IS FLOWING and I will show how the concept of flowing was elaborated in the *Rgveda* in order to express cosmogonic, cosmologic and cognitive processes. Then I will show some instances of its usage in the later Veda (*Atharvaveda*, *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*). I will also discuss its purely abstract meaning in the philosophy of the *Mahābhārata*. The full analysis of the concept of flowing as the source domain for conceptualization of process in Indian philosophy needs a separate research. In this paper I will only focus on certain aspects of the problem taking as my examples some usages of the root *kṣar-* and its derivative *akṣāra*, and the noun *pūrṇa*.

### ***kṣar-* in the *Mahābhārata***

In the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, a philosophical section of the *Mahābhārata*, *kṣar-* is used in a pure abstract sense to express the process:

*na strī na pumān vāpi napuṃsakaṃ ca na sann na cāsat  
sad asac ca tan na |*

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<sup>8</sup> Lakoff, Johnson. *Philosophy...*, p. 394.

*paśyanti yad brahmavido manuṣyās tad akṣaram na  
kṣaratīti viddhi || 12.194.24*

The Vedic masters see that, which is not female, male, or neuter; it is neither existent nor non-existent, nor even existent and non-existent. Know it as the imperishable – that which does not fade away<sup>9</sup>.

*kr̥tsnam etāvatas tāta kṣarate vyaktasamjñakam |  
ahany ahani bhūtātmā tataḥ kṣara iti smṛtaḥ ||  
12.291.34*

*etad akṣaram ity uktam kṣaratīdam yathā jagat |  
12.291.35*

So far everything perishes, my dear, which is called manifest, every day – the Soul of being. Because of that it is remembered as perishable. And that is imperishable while this world perishes.

In the stanzas quoted above, the root *kṣar-* expresses the dynamism of the world and its constant change which is connected with waning and perishing. This is contrasted to the transcendent aspect of reality that is constant and unchangeable. In other contexts in the *Mahābhārata* the meaning of flowing is well attested within the semantic range of the root *kṣar-* and is used to denote flowing of various liquids especially the flowing of blood<sup>10</sup>. However, in this philosophical contexts it is not necessary to evoke this meaning in order to understand the dynamism of the world it expresses. Arguably much more thought is needed to evoke the concept of light in Descartes' definition of intuition than is necessary here.

From the point of view of cognitive linguistics the abstract concept is a concept whose source domain has lost its motivating character and it is not necessary to evoke the source domain in order to understand the target domain. In other words the more difficult it is to activate the source domain of a concept, the more abstract the concept. And such is the concept

<sup>9</sup> *Mahābhārata. Book Twelve. Peace. Volume Three 'The Book of Liberation'*. Translated by A. Wynne A., New York 2009, p. 259.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. 3.263. 4; 1.63.26; 1.128.4; 7.35.28; 5.180.30, flowing of water: 7.67.11; 7.87.17; 7.55 27 (I looked for the references in *Digital Corpus of Sanskrit*: <http://kjc-fs-cluster.kjc.uni-heidelberg.de/dcs/index.php>)

of flowing when evoked in the philosophical contexts of the *Mahābhārata*. In the translation, it is not necessary to render the concept of flowing. Indeed just the opposite as it would seem odd because the intention of the authors is clearly to express only the target domain which is change. This is also the case with the translation of Descartes' ideas about intuition which uses the concepts of light which usage seems to be consistent with his intentions.

It is also worth noting that the metaphor PROCESS IS FLOWING is evoked by other verbal expressions and images in the *Mahābhārata*. The word *samsāra* betrays this conceptualization as here the process is specified as a constant change of infiniteless incarnations of beings. This metaphor is elaborated in the *Mokṣadharmā* where the aspects of existence and entanglement into it is conceived in terms of elements of the watery world (12.227.11-15). The word *tīrtha* evokes conceptualization of the world in terms of a flowing river and the sacred places are conceived of in terms of fords which enable the pious to cross, i.e. to reach the state that does not flow and which is therefore changeless and permanent. Further the concept of raft used by the Buddha to conceptualize his liberating teaching exploits this metaphor. Contrary to the philosophical passages of the *Mokṣadharmā* that use the root *kṣar-*, in these particular cases the source domain, which, is a flowing river, has an explanatory role and is often consciously elaborated by those who evoke it.

Conceptualization of process in terms of flowing goes back to the *Rgveda* and is developed in the later Vedic texts. In the Vedic texts the source domain is important for conceptualization and to express how the world is created and how it functions. What is more, in the *Rgveda* the source domain was also used to create not only abstract but also general concepts with which to encompass cosmic and cognitive processes.

### ***kṣar-* in the *Rgveda***

Let us consider the following stanzas:

*gaurīr mimāya salilāni tākṣatī ékapadī dvipádī sá  
cātuṣpadī |  
aṣṭāpadī nāvapadī babhūvúṣī sahásrākṣarā paramé  
vioman || (1.164.41)*

The female buffalo roared, she chopped the floods,  
becoming one-legged, two-legged, four-legged, eight-  
legged, nine-legged, with thousands of not flowing in the  
highest heaven.

*tāsyāḥ samudrā ádhi ví kṣaranti téna jīvanti pradiśas  
cátasrah |*

*tátaḥ kṣarati akṣáram tád víśvam úpa jīvati || (1.164.42)*

From her the oceans flow out; thanks to that the four  
directions live. From there flows what does not flow;  
thanks to it all lives.

The source domain elaborated in these two stanzas is a female buffalo that is standing in water or rather, as I would assume, in a marsh. She is presented as multiplying her legs so it can be presumed that she is moving in the water or the marsh so quickly that an onlooker would get the impression that her legs are multiplied. The use of the concept of chopping has some metaphorical aims. One of them is to express that she is stamping in the mud and thus changes the form of the mud; her stamping is conceived in terms of chopping. The verb *kṣar-*, which is used in the formula *tátaḥ kṣarati akṣáram* in most cases in the *Rgveda*<sup>11</sup> denotes flowing of water or Soma. This meaning is strengthened in the stanzas quoted above by the concept of *salilá* in which the she-buffalo stands. If we agree that she stands in the mud, we can understand that stamping makes its water flow.

There are several target domains expressed by this source domain. The first is creation of the world evoked by stanza 42

<sup>11</sup> E.g.: 1.72.10, 1.125.4, 7.34.2, 9.21.3, 9.89.1, 9.98.11 I looked for the references in Lubotsky A. *A Rgvedic Word Concordance*, 2 vols. New Haven, Connecticut 1997.

according to which, thanks to the activity undertaken by she-buffalo, everything can live (*téna jīvanti pradīśaś cātasraḥ, tád viśvam úpa jīvati*). Within the frame of this conceptualization the Creator is conceived in terms of she-buffalo<sup>12</sup> and creation in terms of the flowing of water.

The word *akṣāra*, which is used in the formula *tátaḥ kṣaraty akṣāram* and in the compound *sahásrākṣarā*, has several meanings in the *Rgveda* that have been discussed by a number of scholars<sup>13</sup>. I will firstly refer to the etymological meaning of *akṣāra*, i.e. 'not flowing'. To qualify the she-buffalo as *sahásrākṣarā* implies that she contains in herself thousands of not flowing elements. It is possible that the recipient is expected here to imagine the she-buffalo as pregnant with multiple embryos in her womb which do not move. Roaring and stamping, she gives birth to them and since during birth amniotic fluids flow and wet the new born calves we can assume that the formula *tátaḥ kṣaraty akṣāram* also refers to this process. If this is the case, the concept of giving birth is a source domain which facilitates thinking about creation<sup>14</sup>.

We can see the skill of the poet who finds a verbal expression which simultaneously evokes two sources domains namely the concept of flowing and giving birth and the target domain of creation. What is more, the clash between the source and the target domains enables the poet to express more about the latter. In the formula *tátaḥ kṣarati akṣāram*, the verb *kṣarati* highlights the literal meaning of *akṣāram* thanks to which the poet can express the paradoxical character of creation: the activity of she-buffalo is flowing of something which does not flow. Creation conceived in these terms is change of the unchanged, perishing of the imperishable, action of the inactive.

<sup>12</sup> Probably Aditi is meant here, cf. Macdonell A. A. *Vedic Mythology*. Strassburg 1897. In the RV she is presented as the cow, the milk of which is Soma. For further implication of conceptualization of the Creator in terms of she-buffalo see Jurewicz, *Fire...*

<sup>13</sup> It has also a variant *ākṣarā*. See especially: Bergaigne A. 'Études sur le lexique du Āig-Veda'. *Journal Asiatique* 2, 1883, 468-527, Buitenen J. A. B. van. 1988b. 'Notes on akṣara'. In: *Studies in Indian Literature and Philosophy. Collected Articles of J. A. B. van Buitenen*. L. Rocher 1988. (ed.). Delhi 1988, p. 157-179. I discussed the semantic range of *akṣāra/ākṣara* in Jurewicz, *Fire...*, p. 85-89.

<sup>14</sup> Such integration of concepts of flowing and giving birth is called blending in the cognitive linguistics.

But it is not the end of the story. The concept of she-buffalo is not frequent in the *Rgveda*. It evokes the concept of another animal, much more common in the Rgvedic society which is the cow. The concept of cow is a source domain for various target domains such as rivers, dawns and speech<sup>15</sup>. If the recipient of the stanzas evoke these target domains, he will understand that they also describe the flow of rivers, the appearance of dawn and speaking.

If the recipient evokes the metaphoric conceptualization RIVERS ARE COWS, he will elaborate the source domain of flowing and see it in more concrete terms of the flow of rivers from mountains<sup>16</sup>. He will then better understand the paradoxical character of creation because in the source domain rivers flow but in the target domain they flow and do not flow at the same time.

If the recipient evokes the metaphoric conceptualization DAWNS ARE COWS he would understand the she-buffalo as the primeval Dawn who creates dawns which come every morning and call into being time and space<sup>17</sup>. The conceptual coherence of this interpretation can be seen in the *Rgveda* where the appearance of dawn is conceived in terms of the flow of bright water (7.60.4, 3.22.3).

Activation of the mapping SPEECH IS A COW is especially strongly justified by the meaning of the word *akṣāra* which in some contexts in the *Rgveda* can be interpreted as 'syllable, word, speech'<sup>18</sup>. In the stanzas that are analyzed here, this meaning is also supported by the mapping THINKING IS FLOWING and SPEAKING IS FLOWING. The first mapping is explicitly evoked in two stanzas where thoughts (*dhītāyaḥ*) are presented as flowing (8.49.6, 8.50.4). The second mapping is connected with conceptualization of head in terms of a vessel

<sup>15</sup> River Are Cows e.g.: 1.73.6, 3.33.1, 10.75.7, Dawns Are Cows e.g.: 1.92.4, 4.51.2, 6.32.2, Speech Is Cow e.g. 8.10.10-11. For the analysis of concept of cow in the *Rgveda* cf. Srinivasan D. *Concept of Cow in the Rgveda*. Delhi 1979

<sup>16</sup> This is again an example of blending of concepts.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jurewicz, *Fire...*, p. 89, 107 ff.

<sup>18</sup> I do not agree with Bergaigne ('Études...') who maintains that this is the main and only meaning of this word in the *Rgveda*. Just the opposite, its usages in the *Rgveda* imply its conscious polysemy.



filled with liquid and speech which flows from it<sup>19</sup>. The concept of speaking is also evoked here by the use of the verbal root *takṣ-*, ‘to chop’; in the *Rgveda* composition of hymns was conceived in terms of chopping (e.g. 1.109.1).

Thanks to the skillful construction of the formula *tátaḥ kṣarati akṣáram* the poet creates not only an abstract concept of the paradoxical activity of the Creator but also a concept of creation as a whole. Activity of the Creator encompasses all essential processes of the world, both cosmic (appearance of the morning light) and cognitive (thinking and speaking). These processes are paradoxical in that appearance of dawn is shining of what does not shine and speaking is expressing what is inexpressible.

So the verbal root *kṣar-* is used in *Rgveda* 1.164.41-42 conveys both an abstract and a general meaning. However as in the case of Descartes’ concept of intuition, activation of the source domain of the conceptual metaphor is necessary to give more information about the target domain. The poet consciously transforms the concepts well known from everyday life experience in such a way that the recipient could understand the paradoxical character of the Creator’s activity. The recipient is expected to refer to the logic of the source domain and then to negate it. If he does not do that he loses some essential aspects of the processes expressed by the target domain.

### ***kṣar-* in the Brāhmaṇas**

As van Buitenen has shown, the Brāhmaṇas focus on the meanings of *akṣára* connected with speaking treated as a faculty of the Absolute<sup>20</sup>. I would like to add that in their analysis of the meaning of the word *akṣara*, composers of these texts also exploit the source domain of flowing. Let us consider the following passage of the *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*:

<sup>19</sup> 9.12.6. Cf. Jurewicz, *Fire...*, p. 166-167, 379.

<sup>20</sup> Buitenen, ‘Notes...’.

*sa etad akṣaram abhyapīlayat | tasyābhipīlitasya rasah  
prāṇedat | 1.24.1 tad akṣarad eva | yad akṣarad eva  
tasmād akṣaram | 1.24.2 yad evākṣaram nākṣīyata  
tasmād akṣayam | akṣayam ha vai nāmaitat | tat  
akṣaram iti parokṣam ācakṣate | 1.24.3*

He squeezed this *akṣara*; when it was squeezed juice trickled forth. That flowed, hence it is *akṣara*. As the *akṣara* did not perish, therefore it is *akṣaya*. In fact, *akṣara* is really *akṣaya*; they call it *akṣara* to mystify<sup>21</sup>.

In this passage the metaphor PROCESS IS FLOWING is elaborated in order to explain the etymology of the word *akṣara* understood as syllable OM. It is conceived in terms of a juice which originates from squeezing. The paradoxical character of creation of the syllable OM is expressed with the formula *yad akṣarad eva tasmād akṣaram* which can be treated as a variant of the Rgvedic formula *tataḥ kṣarati akṣaram*; the phonetic resemblance between *akṣarat* and *akṣaram* makes it even more semantically powerful. At the same time the meaning of flowing conveyed by the form *akṣarat* highlights the meaning of not flowing of *akṣaram*. But everyday rational thinking is helpless with the explanation: “That flowed, hence it is not flowing”, similarly or even more than with the Rgvedic statement “From there flows what does not flow”. Probably because of that the translator of the quoted text left *akṣara* in the original. But in this way he misses the intention of the composer. Because similarly, as in the *Rgveda*, the clash of the concepts of flowing and not flowing enables the composer of the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* to express the paradoxical character of first pronunciation of OM.

In the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* passage, the process conceived with use of the domain of flowing is specified as speaking. However, there are contexts which integrate the process of speaking with creation of the world, e.g. in the following passage of the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*:

<sup>21</sup> Buitenen’s translation: ‘Notes..., p. 162.

*tad yād asrjyatākṣarat tad yad ākṣarat tasmād akṣāram*  
(6.1.3.6)

Now that which was created was flowing; and inasmuch as it was flowing (*ākṣarat*), a syllable (*akṣara*) resulted there from<sup>22</sup>.

The context of this sentence is clearly cosmogonic and Eggeling's translation of *akṣāra* as 'syllable' loses this context and narrows it down to the creation of speech. The sentence appears at the end of description of creation. The source domain is the boiling of water and the purification of gold. Gold is the final form of the creative process. This final form flows as heated gold flows. Then it becomes the earth<sup>23</sup>. Here the source domain of flowing is expressed by two verbs: *asrjyata* and *ākṣarat* that are the basis for explanation of what is *akṣāra*. It is worth noting that the concept of the purification of gold lessens the paradoxical character of the process expressed by the source domain: the clarified gold is liquid when it is hot, then it becomes solid when it cools down. So in one moment it flows and then it does not. As far as water is concerned, it is possible that it stops flowing when it is enclosed in a container but it is always a liquid with the potentiality to flow. However, the formulation of *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* is the same as that of the *Rgveda* and the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* because the author implies that flowing and not flowing occur at the same time and the very fact of flowing is the reason for the name that literally means 'not flowing'.

### ***pūrṇā in the Atharwaveda and the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad***

As cognitive linguistics shows, not only are complex concepts conceived by various source domains but also conceptual metaphors can be (and often are) evoked by various linguistic

<sup>22</sup> Eggeling's translation: *The Śatapathabrāhmaṇa According to the Text of the Mādhyamīna School. Translated by Julius Eggeling*. Vol. 3, Oxford 1894: 158.

<sup>23</sup> 6.1.3.7: *ābhūd vā iyām pratiṣṭhēti | tad bhūmir abhavat tām aprathayat sã pṛthivy abhavat*.

expressions<sup>24</sup>. The reason is that they usually highlight a different aspect of the source or/and the target domain. And this is the case of the metaphor PROCESS IS FLOWING. It is not only evoked by the use of the verb kṣar- and its nominal derivate akṣara. Another linguistic expression in the Veda which evokes this metaphor is the word pūrṇá. The descriptions with the use of this word elaborate a different kind of flowing to those analyzed so far as it is not the flow of river but the pouring of water from a vessel.

Let us consider the following passage from the *Atharvaveda*:

*ūrdhvām bhārantam udakām kumbhénevodahāryām |  
páśyanti sárve cákṣuṣā ná sárve mánasā viduḥ || 10.8.14*  
Him who carries water upward, like a woman carrying  
water in a jar, all see with their eye; not all know [him]  
with their mind<sup>25</sup>.

The source domain is constituted by a woman who draws water from a well in some sort of vessel. The target domain is the functioning of the cosmos. In the early Veda the sun is conceived in terms of a vessel (in the *Rgveda* it is often a golden vessel) filled with water which is the source domain for rain originating from the sun<sup>26</sup>. The sunrise is conceived in terms of lifting of the vessel from a well while raining is the pouring the contents of the vessel which takes place when the sun reaches zenith. This metaphor is evoked by the stanza quoted above and the agent who causes the sunrise is conceived in terms of a water carrier. So, everyone sees how the sun rises, not everyone understands who causes this process.

*dūré pūrṇéna vasati dūrā ūnéna hīyate |  
mahád yakṣám bhūvanasya mādhye tásmāi balīm  
rāṣṭrabhr̥to bharanti || 10.8.15*  
Afar he dwells with the full, afar he is freed from the  
deficient – the great Prodigy in the middle of the

<sup>24</sup> and non verbal signs.

<sup>25</sup>Edgerton's translation: Edgerton F., *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy*, London 1965, p. 99.

<sup>26</sup>E.g. 9.83.3 cf. Jurewicz, *Fire...*, p. 165-167.

universe; to him the rules of kingdoms bring tribute<sup>27</sup>.

This stanza presents the absolute essence of the world. It is conceived in terms of a spirit (a Prodigy, as Edgerton renders the word *yakṣá*). On the one hand it is transcendent (he dwells 'afar'), on the other hand it is immanent (he is 'in the middle of the universe'). In its transcendent aspect it is perfect which is expressed literally ('he is freed from the deficient') and in terms of metaphor: 'he dwells with the full'. Since according to the next stanza the sun rises out of it and in it sets, the recipient understands that it is the agent of the sunrise mentioned in the stanza 14.

The following stanza is the evidence for further abstraction in thinking:

*pūrṇāt pūrṇám úd acati pūrṇám pūrṇéna sicyate |  
utó tát adyá vidyāma yátas tát pariśicyáte || 10.8.29*  
From the full he ladles out the full; the full is poured out  
by the full; would that we might know today that, from  
which that is poured out<sup>28</sup>.

In this analysis of the beginnings of the abstract philosophical language another methodological tool proposed by cognitive linguistics is very useful that of conceptual metonymy. This is a model of thinking within a specific conceptual domain by which access to a part or the whole domain is achieved through another part called the vehicle. The concept which becomes accessible *via* the vehicle is called the target concept<sup>29</sup>. The metonymy evoked in the stanza quoted above is metonymy QUALITY FOR AN OBJECT, i.e. FULLNESS FOR A FULL VESSEL. The same kind of metonymy operates when the word 'blacks' is used in reference to people with dark skin (QUALITY FOR A PEOPLE)<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Edgerton's translation: Edgerton, *The Beginnings...*, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Edgerton's translation, Edgerton, *The Beginnings...*, p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> Also the whole conceptual domain can be the vehicle which gives aspect to its aspects, e.g. we say *Let's light the Christmas tree!* when we think about its candles.

<sup>30</sup> This metonymy operates in the *Rgveda* too, e.g. 1.130.8, 9.73.

In case of metonymy, abstraction occurs when the vehicle begins to exist independently and loses its referential function within the metonymic concept. And to some extent this is the case of the stanza quoted above. The recipient can interpret *pūrṇā* as the noun denoting fullness and does not have to evoke metonymically the target concept (a full vessel) in order to understand the perfectness of the Creator in both aspects: transcendent on the one hand and immanent on the other<sup>31</sup>. In that they are conceived in the same way, the recipient concludes they are ontologically the same.

However, the recipient will understand much more of the nature of reality and of creation if he evokes the target concept of the metonymy which is a full vessel and the concept of pouring water<sup>32</sup>. Thus he will evoke the metaphor PROCESS IS FLOWING and conceive creation in terms of pouring water from a vessel. Activation of this source domain enables the recipient to understand the paradoxical nature of creation. From everyday experience he knows that when a vessel is full, water is not flowing and when water begins to flow a vessel will become empty. Here, however, notwithstanding how much water will flow out, the vessel will be always full. Both aspects of reality are conceived in terms of fullness and the difference between them consists in the conceptualization of the immanent aspect as fullness which flows and in the conceptualization of the transcendent aspect as fullness which does not flow.

The definition which appears in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is even more abstract:

*pūrṇām adāh pūrṇām idāṁ pūrṇāt pūrṇam údacyate |  
pūrṇāsya pūrṇām ādāya pūrṇām evāvaśiṣyate | 5.1.1*

The world there is full; The world here is full; Fullness from fullness proceeds. After taking fully from the full, it still remains completely full<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> In the same way as he does not have to evoke the target concept in the previous stanza.

<sup>32</sup> This concept is also evoked metonymically A Salient Element For The Whole Activity (A Vessel For Pouring Water).

<sup>33</sup> Olivelle's translation: Lovell, P. *The Early Upaniṣad. Annotated Text and Translation*. New York-Oxford 1998, p. 133. The concept of the sky and the earth was

The concepts of ‘the world there’ (i.e. the sky) and ‘the world here’ (i.e. the earth) metonymically evoke the concepts of two aspects of reality: the earth evokes the immanent aspect where the living beings are born, the sky stands for the transcendent aspect. Both aspects are conceived in terms of fullness. Creation is presented as the outpouring of fullness from fullness that evokes the source domain of pouring water from a vessel. The basic idea, of paradoxical activity conceived in terms of flowing of what does not flow, is preserved. What is more, the second hemistich expresses explicitly that creation does not change the Creator in any respect and there is no difference between the Creator and creation. In this definition the concept of fullness becomes an abstraction which refers to the Absolute – a perfect being which is neither influenced nor diminished by the changes which take place during creation.

### ***Mahābhārata* once again**

As mentioned earlier, in philosophical parts of the *Mahābhārata*, the root *kṣar-* loses the meaning of the source domain, which is flowing, and is limited only to the target domain which is the process. Thus, in the contexts which use *kṣar-*, the paradoxical character of the creative activity of the Absolute also disappears; what is preserved, is the opposition of its two aspects: transcendent is imperishable and unchanging, immanent is perishable and changing.

The word *pūrṇa* in the *Mahābhārata* is almost exclusively used in reference to a liquid<sup>34</sup>. As far as I am aware, the Vedic conceptualization of creation in terms of pouring from a vessel is evoked just once, in the Sanatsujāta’s teaching. The changes are minor and the concept of paradoxical activity of the Absolute is the same as in the Veda:

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evoked metonymically, *via* non-linguistic vehicle, evoked here by words *adās* and *idām*, which is a gesture of the speaker pointing at the sky and the earth. These are the linguistic examples of orality of the ancient Indian literature, cf. Olivelle, P. *The Early...*, p. XXI-XXII. Gombrich R. *What the Buddha thought*. London, Oakville 2009, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. 1.25.26, 1.57.68, 3.73.11, 3.126.14,

*pūrṇāt pūrṇam uddharanti pūrṇāt pūrṇāni cakrire |  
 haranti pūrṇāt pūrṇāni pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate |  
 yoginas taṁ prapaśyanti bhagavantaṁ sanātanam |  
 5.45.10*

From the full they pull the full, from the full they make  
 the full, from the full they take the full, yet the full is  
 always left full – the yogins behold the sempiternal  
 blessed Lord<sup>35</sup>.

It should be noted, however, that this chapter is constructed in such a way that it quotes passages from various Vedic texts, so we cannot be sure if the concept of fullness had the same explanatory power for the composers of the *Mahābhārata* as it had for the composers of the Veda.

### Conclusion

From what has been said above it can be seen how the early Indian texts build abstract concepts with use of concepts from everyday life experience. The concept of the Absolute, of creation of the world, of the relation between the Absolute and its creation, are construed with aid of concepts of water which flows and does not flow. The methodological tools provided by the cognitive linguistics enable us to see the structure of these concepts. The logic of the source domain is mapped onto the target domains and transformed at the same time in order to express the paradoxical nature of the Absolute which is a perfect being although changing. Incidentally this illustrates a fundamental difference with European philosophy in that the European definition of the Absolute regards permanence as one of the Absolute's most important attributes<sup>36</sup>.

We can see that, as in the case of Descartes' concept of intuition, activation of the source domain of a conceptual

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<sup>35</sup> *The Mahābhārata. Translated and Edited by J. A. B. van Buitenen.* 4. The Book of Virāṭa. 5. The Book of the Effort. Chicago and London 1978, p. 292.

<sup>36</sup> Kołakowski L. *Horror metaphysicus*, Warszawa 1990, p. 45ff.



metaphor is necessary. By doing so we gain an enhanced understanding of an author's world view in line with that authors original conceptualization of any particular target domain. We can also see that the concept of flowing is an abstract concept in the same way as the concept of light in Descartes' theory of cognition. The ability for abstract thinking is common to human mind and was realized even in the most archaic times and it is clear that the Vedic texts demonstrate a capability to construct and manipulate the concepts at highest level of abstraction.

